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Title: Regarding the plight of tea garden workers in the country.

SHRI ADHIR RANJAN CHOWDHURY (BAHARAMPUR): I would like to draw the attention of the House to this issue. In West Bengal, stretching from Jalpaiguri to Darjeeling Districts, there are 273 tea gardens where more than 11 lakh plantation labourers used to live for generations. Now, they are subjected to death and destitution because the tea gardens have virtually been turned into an enclave of poverty and penury.

Since 2002, more than 1000 plantation workers have lost their lives due to starvation. Since January this year, 100 people died of malnutrition. Already the Labour Department of West Bengal conducted an exhaustive survey on the plight of the tea garden workers. It has been found that – I am seeking your indulgence from you, only to refer to the report of the Labour Department – 87 tea estates could not provide registration certificate or number under the Plantation Labour Act. Secondly, 116 tea estates have been run by different managements in the last ten years. Some of these estates are run by promoters who do not care for long-term development of plantation. Thirdly, 175 estates do not have Labour Welfare Officers. Fourthly, 41 tea estates did not deposit money towards PF contribution in 2012-13. In 46 estates, the total PF dues as part of workers' contribution are Rs.17.14 crore; in 55 estates, the dues as part of management's contribution amounted to Rs. 33.79 crore. Lastly, eight estates have not paid wages to workers. In 35 estates, workers are yet to be paid wage-arrears as per the last wage settlement.

I would urge upon the Minister of Commerce to take immediate steps to carry out appropriate amendment to the Act to enable the State Government, not only to take over the tea plantations that are not being run properly, but also to take stringent actions against those owners who indulge in fraudulent activities, in order to protect the interests of poor workers. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER:

Shri S.S. Ahluwalia is permitted to associate with the above issue.